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ABSTRACT

This digest provides background information about gender equity in sports and physical activity as well as specific strategies for achieving equity at the middle and secondary school levels. The paper begins by describing gender equitable sports programs as ones in which either boys or girls would be pleased to accept as its own the program of the other. The digest then explains briefly the legal basis for gender equity in sport, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972. The main body of the digest presents a discussion of monitoring gender equity in middle and secondary school athletic programs. In sports programs, gender equity requires that equal athletic opportunities be provided for both genders and encompasses equivalence measures in the following areas: (1) accommodating the athletic interests and abilities of females, the historically underrepresented sex (including the selection of sports and levels of competition); (2) equipment and supplies; (3) scheduling; (4) opportunity to receive coaching (and academic tutoring); (5) assignment and salary of coaches (and tutors); (6) travel and per diem allowances; (7) locker rooms, medical, and other facilities; (8) housing and dining facilities and services; and (9) publicity and promotion. (LL)

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ERIC DIGEST

PROMOTING GENDER EQUITY IN MIDDLE AND SECONDARY SCHOOL SPORTS PROGRAMS

by

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SP 035 118

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Promoting Gender Equity in Middle and Secondary School Sports Programs

Laurie Priest and Liane M. Summerfield

Sports equity is important at the middle and secondary school levels, not only to increase opportunities for young women in sports and physical activity, but to change perceptions—particularly the incorrect perception that sports participation is not important for girls and women. This Digest will provide background information about gender equity as well as specific strategies for achieving equity at the middle and secondary school levels.

What Is Gender Equity

Gender equity may have many different meanings within the various academic and nonacademic programs offered by a school. In sports, gender equity "describes an environment in which fair and equitable distribution of overall athletic opportunities, benefits, and resources is available to women and men and in which student-athletes, coaches, and athletics administrators are not subject to gender-based discrimination. An athletics program is gender equitable when either the men's or women's sports program would be pleased to accept as its own the overall program of the other gender" (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 1993, p. 1).

The Legal Basis for Gender Equity in Sport

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 prohibits institutions that receive federal funding from gender discrimination in educational programs or activities. Because almost all schools receive federal funds, Title IX applies to nearly everyone.

Although it was not written specifically for sports programs, Title IX resulted in an immediate increase in female sports participants. From 1971-80, the number of female athletes at the high school level increased 616%, with females accounting for approximately 35% of high school athletes in 1980 (Title IX, 1993). Today, girls still account for about 35% of high school athletes, although at 1.9 million participants the number of females in sports at the high school level has never been higher (National Federation, 1994).

Monitoring Gender Equity in Middle and Secondary School Athletic Programs

Within the past year, a number of Title IX lawsuits have highlighted the vulnerability of colleges and universities to claims of gender discrimination in intercollegiate athletics. There is no reason to assume that middle and secondary school programs are immune to litigation. Between 1981 and 1991, 411 complaints involving elementary and secondary school athletics were filed with the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights, which oversees compliance with Title IX (Goldman, 1991). The 1992 decision of the Supreme Court affirming monetary damages to be awarded in Title IX enforcement actions increases the likelihood of lawsuits.

In sports programs, gender equity requires that equal athletic opportunities be provided for both genders and encompasses the following areas, which are further described below: accommodating the athletic interests and abilities of the historically underrepresented sex (including the selection of sports and levels of competition); equipment and supplies; scheduling; opportunity to receive coaching (and academic tutoring); assignment and salary of coaches (and tutors); travel and per diem allowances; locker rooms, medical, and other facilities; housing and dining facilities and services; and publicity and promotion. *Title IX Toolbox* (National Association of Girls and Women in Sports, 1992) and *Playing Fair* (Women's Sports Foundation, 1992) are sources of additional information.

Funding. Equal aggregate funding for boys' and girls' individual sports programs is not required, nor is it required that expenditures for specific sports be equal, but schools must provide necessary funding so that the *quality* of the girls program equals that of the boys. Disparity in girls' and boys' total sports funding is a strong indicator of inequality in program opportunities. Revenue-producing sports are not exempt from the law.

Equipment and Supplies. These include but are not limited to uniforms and other apparel, sport-specific and general equipment and supplies, instructional devices, and conditioning/weight-training equipment. Equivalence is measured by such factors as quality, amount, suitability, maintenance and replacement, and availability of equipment and supplies. For example, if new uniforms are purchased for the boys' soccer team every 2 years, the same schedule of uniform replacement must be afforded the girls' program. If the booster club purchases jackets for the boys' basketball team every year, jackets must also be purchased annually for the girls' team, even if the girls' jackets have to be purchased through the athletic department budget.

Scheduling Practices and Contests. Equivalence is measured by such factors as the number, length, and time of day of practice opportunities; the number and quality of competitive events and the time of day these are scheduled; and opportunities for preseason and postseason competition. Prime practice time must be shared equally.

Travel and Per Diem Allowances. Equivalence is measured by factors such as the modes of transportation, housing

SP 035 118

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furnished during travel, length of stay before and after competitive events, per diem allowances, and dining arrangements. Food allowances must be equal for boys and girls, and if special pregame meals are provided for boys, they must also be available for girls. If an overnight stay is required, rooming arrangements must be of equal quality, and numbers of students per room must be equal.

Coaching. Regarding assignment of coaches, equivalency is determined by comparing such factors as training, experience, and professional qualifications and professional standing. Regarding compensation, equivalence is determined by comparing such factors as pay rate, length of contracts, conditions of contract renewal, experience, coaching duties, working conditions, and other terms and conditions of employment. Coaches with similar contractual expectations should be paid equally, whether the coach is responsible for the boys' or girls' team. Qualified coaches must be hired for both boys' and girls' teams.

Locker Rooms and Other Facilities. Equivalence is measured by such factors as the quality and availability and exclusivity of use of practice and competitive facilities, the availability and quality of locker rooms, the maintenance of practice and competitive facilities, and the preparation of facilities for practices and competition. Practice and contest facilities must be comparable, and girls may not be relegated to facilities of lesser quality.

Medical and Training Facilities and Services. Equivalence is measured by such factors as the availability of medical personnel and assistance; health, accident, and injury insurance coverage; the availability and quality of weight training and conditioning facilities; and the availability and qualifications of athletic trainers. It is recognized that certain sports carry a greater risk for injury, but injuries are not gender based, so medical care must be of equal quality, as appropriate for each particular sport.

Publicity. Equivalence is measured by such factors as the availability and quality of sports information personnel, access to other publicity resources, and the quality and quantity of publications and other promotional devices. For example, if a media guide is published for the boys' basketball team, a media guide of equal quality must be prepared for the girls' team.

Sports Opportunities. Because demand for specific sports may vary between boys and girls, sports equity does not necessarily mean that numbers of teams must be equal. However, when the historically underrepresented gender (females) has the interest and ability for a particular sport, whether contact or noncontact, this interest must be accommodated. Girls should have similar opportunities for participation in a variety of sports (i.e., team versus individual, contact versus noncontact) in all seasons. There can be gender-separate teams or physical education classes for contact sports (e.g., wrestling, boxing, rugby, ice hockey, football, basketball) where there is a high probability of body contact.

Conclusion

Although sports for girls and women have made great strides in the past 20 years, it is clear that equality does not exist. For example, in his report on the status of interscholastic sports equity in Minnesota, Dildine observes that, "the data does make unequivocally clear that athletic programs for boys and girls are not equal. There are more, and more varied sports offerings for boys, more money spent on boys athletics, and more money spent per participant for boys athletics" (Dildine, 1992, p. 3-4).

For schools to be in compliance with Title IX, they must address and correct inequalities without delay. The law requires schools to designate and publish the name and school address of an employee to coordinate compliance with Title IX. Schools should also conduct a self-study, considering the areas outlined above and involving school personnel, parents, and students. In a school that complies with Title IX, either the boys or girls sports program would be pleased to accept as its own the program of the other.

References

References identified with an EJ or ED number have been abstracted and are in the ERIC database. Journal articles (EJ) should be available at most research libraries; documents (ED) are available in ERIC microfiche collections at more than 700 locations. Documents can also be ordered through the ERIC Document Reproduction Service: (800) 443-ERIC.

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